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Tommy Nobis Center uses Recycletronics to create jobs

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Bobbie Knopf looked around in what will be the new warehouse for The Tommy Nobis Center.

It's in an industrial building in Kennesaw, just minutes away from the center's current location in Marietta. Stacks of recyclable materials are packaged in the aisles of a warehouse the size of about two football fields. No one is working, except a forklift operator who stops to chat with Knopf and Karen Carlisle, the Vice President of Corporate Communications at the Tommy Nobis Center.

Knopf is a co-founder of The Tommy Nobis Center, a non-profit organization that provides job training, vocational support and employment to people with developmental disabilities. Knopf's involvement began when she was the chair of the special education department at Northside High School and she was looking for an initiative to help her special needs students receive job training.

While the first effort brought a nice addition to the school, Knopf, along with Joyce Slaughter, a parent of one of Knopf's students, began assessing a need for high school graduates with disabilities to receive employment training. Knopf and Slaughter then asked Tommy Nobis, a No. 1 drafted linebacker with the Atlanta Falcons who was instrumental in bringing the Special Olympics to Georgia, if he'd lend his name to their cause.

He obliged, and The Tommy Nobis Center was born in 1977.

But with the economy in its current condition, the government cut off its funding to the agency a couple of years ago. The Tommy Nobis Center was hurting financially and in need of new sources of income to help keep the organization afloat.

Enter Recycletronics, the reason Knopf and Carlisle are looking around in the new industrial warehouse.

"It's exciting to see," Knopf said. "You take electronics, telephones, computers, TVs - 100s of them. People donate them. And they take them apart and the glass goes in one place and it goes through a humongous machine that grinds them up, and all these materials are recycled."

Knopf was excited for good reason. When she first thought of the development of an organization such as The Tommy Nobis Center she was helping students with developmental disabilities with employment training in a trailer outside of a high school.

Now, The Tommy Nobis Center helps people diagnosed with Autism as well as people with hearing loss and many other types of disabilities. Carlisle added the center will also help people recovering from drug or alcohol addiction.

Regarding Recycletronics, it was a business in which the Tommy Nobis Center became interested after Vice President of Business Services Mike Daniels read an article in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution about an electronics drive at Turner Field. The drive was for people who wished to recycle their televisions, computers and other electronic devices.

The recycling drive was put on by Sony, Waste Management and Marietta-based company MOLAM International, which had a division called Recycletronics.

Recycletronics takes apart the glass from electronic equipment, and then separates the glass into leaded and unleaded. When it's finished the usable glass is ground up as fine as sand and sold to be recycled into new products.

Daniels contacted MOLAM International President Nader Nejad, and with persistence, a friendship was born. Daniels, and the rest of The Tommy Nobis Center, saw Recycletronics as a way to not only provide the funding for its operation, but also as a way to employ some of the clients it serves.

The center partnered with Nejad's company in June 2009. By November of 2009, **The Tommy Nobis Center had purchased Recycletronics.**

Since The Tommy Nobis Center became involved with Recycletronics, 71 jobs have been created. In addition, Georgia Power signed a contract with

The Tommy Nobis Center to recycle old meters that are being replaced. That has created nine jobs.

"The beauty of what we do is nothing goes to a landfill," Carlisle said. "We want to be good stewards. We're protecting the planet and creating jobs."

In the first year of Recycletronics, the Tommy Nobis Center processed four million pounds of electronic waste. As the center expects more output, expansion was needed. The current warehouse has six loading docks, whereas the new Kennesaw location will have 13.

With the Recycletronics vision working, the center has been able to continue its 33 years tradition of providing job-training opportunities.

"It's important to get a job," Carlisle said. "But it's also important to keep a job. Our folks have unique issues. We do what we call supported employment and that's that we support them in, their employment."

